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To George Bancroft Esq.  
with the sincere regards & esteem of the  
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# HISTORY

OF THE

## FIGHT AT CONCORD,

ON THE

19<sup>TH</sup> OF APRIL, 1775.

WITH A PARTICULAR ACCOUNT OF THE MILITARY OPERATIONS AND  
INTERESTING EVENTS OF THAT EVER MEMORABLE DAY

SHOWING THAT THEN AND THERE

THE FIRST REGULAR AND FORCIBLE RESISTANCE

WAS MADE TO THE BRITISH SOLDIERY, AND THE FIRST BRITISH BLOOD WAS

SHED BY ARMED AMERICANS, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

THUS COMMENCED.

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BY THE REV. EZRA RIPLEY, D. D.,

WITH OTHER CITIZENS OF CONCORD.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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IT may be thought singular, that, at this late period, a particular account of the *Fight at Concord*, on the memorable 19th of April, 1775, should now for the first time make its appearance. Some apology may be thought due to the public for neglecting so long a matter of acknowledged importance, which, we apprehend, will be manifest in the following statement.

During nearly half a century, it was, as we supposed, the universal belief that the *first* regular and forcible resistance to the invading *British* soldiers was made at *Concord North Bridge*;—that *there* the fire of the *British* was *first* returned by the *Americans*;—that *there* the *first British* blood was shed; and of course that *there* commenced the war that terminated in the Independence of the United States. We had no idea that any persons ever would or could *seriously* entertain a different opinion. We had supposed that public records, numerous historical sketches, and common consent were sufficient to perpetuate material facts and prominent characters. When, therefore, the “History of the Battle of Lexington” appeared, in 1825, we were surprised. Nothing could have been more unexpected. That pamphlet has made impressions on the minds of many, unfavorable, in some respects, as we believe, to the truth, and to some worthy and patriotic characters. The same causes which originated these errors, have given rise to opinions and publications in Great Britain and the United States equally erroneous. A large portion of the people do not possess the means of better information; and those who do, have been unwilling to come forward in a controversy very unpleasant and attended with many difficulties.

A writer, however, over the signature of *Middlesex*, in 1826, took up the subject in the “Yeoman’s Gazette,” and pointed out the fallacy of the statements and claims of that “History” in respect to the returning of the fire of the *British*. We thought he fairly settled the question in favor of Concord. Yet nothing like retraction or concession, on the part of the citizens of Lexington, has come to our knowledge. We therefore feel ourselves obligated, and in a measure pledged, to pursue the subject, and to publish the following history.

In the full belief that some of the statements in the history of Major Phinney are erroneous and unjust, we deem it expedient, and doing justice to ourselves, to our fathers, and to the community, to appeal to the public, and to set forth a true history of facts, a faithful and minute account of the events of that interesting day, and the conduct of the military companies and volunteer citizens assembled on that trying occasion.

We feel our obligations to the generations yet to come, to transmit to them, as far as possible, a fair and correct statement of facts respecting those events and transactions, the happy or unhappy consequences of which will descend to them and their successors.

While we are desirous of discharging this duty to posterity, we cannot but deeply regret, that, in an affair of such magnitude and common interest,

as is the commencement of the American revolutionary war, such contradictory opinions and opposite claims should have arisen as cannot be reconciled with the truth of facts, and which, if permitted to continue unrectified, must render the pages of future history doubtful and erroneous.

Unhappy for us that effectual barriers against errors of this kind were not earlier erected. We very much regret that accurate records of the events and transactions of the 19th of April, '75, at Concord, were not made at the time, and carefully preserved. This might have prevented those errors and misrepresentations of which we now complain. Some minutes indeed were made in after years, — some facts were noted, and many are remembered by living witnesses. We believe, therefore, it is yet in our power to vindicate and establish the truth on the subject under consideration.

We have no objections to the historical account given by Major Phinney of the march of the *British* troops from Boston to Lexington, their outrageous behaviour while there, &c., except so far as relates to the *returning* of the fire of the British. This we mean to controvert, and to show by testimony and evidence that cannot be resisted nor rationally disputed, that the inhabitants of Lexington, very recently, have made an unjust claim upon the public faith; — that they have appropriated to themselves facts and honors to which they had no right, and have thereby attempted to wrest from the inhabitants of Concord and adjacent towns, the legitimate honors which their brave and patriotic fathers achieved and bequeathed to them.

Situated as we now are, at this late period, were *we only* concerned, we might still be silent. But when we consider the importance of a just representation of facts in a case of this kind, — the interests of our common country in the matter at issue, — the memory and reputation of our revered and heroic fathers, — we do not feel ourselves at liberty to be inactive. The blood of our patriotic fathers, and the voice of our beloved country, seem imperiously to demand of us a fair, unvarnished statement of facts respecting the *fight* at Concord. And this shall be our endeavour without evasion or false coloring.

It may be added, that the nations of the earth are interested in the American revolution; and they have a right to know from us the *time, place,* and *circumstances*, of the actual commencement of a war of such vast consequences. It is our aim to give them correct information.

Those who may read the following narrative may be desirous of finding in it a general and correct view of the progress of the *British* from the time of their leaving Boston, till they returned to Charlestown heights; and also of the opposing and pursuing *Americans*. It may be desirable also to know some of the previous measures of the Congress of the then colony of Massachusetts. Such a view we purpose to give, and in doing this we shall avail ourselves of the history of Major Phinney, where we find it correct, gratefully acknowledging the saving of labor to ourselves, and giving credit for any assistance that may thereby be afforded.

## HISTORY.

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It is well known that the arbitrary and oppressive acts and measures of the King and Parliament of Great Britain were the causes which led to the revolutionary war, and to a final separation between the United States and the mother country. There are extant so many records and historical accounts of this matter, which are accessible to all classes of people, that it is deemed unnecessary, in this place, to go into any detail of facts and proceedings of that period, farther than simply to introduce the main objects of this publication.

We begin, therefore, with some account of the Provincial Congress and their proceedings, which will show somewhat the state of public affairs at that time, and the measures adopted by the Americans and the British immediately preceding the bloody conflict on the 19th of April, '75.

Public affairs wore so alarming an aspect in the year 1774, that before the dissolution of the General Court in the spring, a *Congress of Delegates* from the several towns in the province was agreed upon. To this Congress the town of Concord sent three,\* the county of Middlesex seventy-four, and the rest of the State, including what is now the state of Maine, two hundred members. The first meeting of the Congress took place at Salem, on the 12th of October, 1774, when they chose the Hon. *John Hancock*, chairman, and Mr. *Benjamin Lincoln*, clerk; and immediately adjourned to Concord. On the 15th the Congress was organized by choosing the chairman and clerk, President and Secretary. They held their meetings in the church. Two sessions, one at 9 o'clock, A. M., and the other at 3 o'clock, P. M., were held each day. The Rev. Mr. Emerson, then

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\* Col. James Barrett, Mr. Samuel Whitney, and Mr. Ephraim Wood, Jr. At the two succeeding Congresses, Colonel Barrett only was chosen.

minister of Concord, officiated as Chaplain. The session was continued a great part of the time in secret, till the 29th of the same month. Their proceedings were marked with great harmony, vigilance, and energy. One of their first acts was, to address the Governor on the state of their grievances; but not receiving a satisfactory answer, a committee for the safety and defence of the province, another to prepare a plan for regulating the militia, and another to estimate the munitions of war that were needed by the province, were chosen. The militia was in part organized, and some general officers were appointed. Capt. James Barrett, at that time, was promoted to be Colonel. On the 29th, Congress adjourned to the 23d of November following. They met again according to adjournment, and continued their spirited proceedings till the 10th of December.

During this session, after, repeated and fruitless attempts to promote reconciliation, on fair terms, with Governor Gage, a large quantity of military stores and provisions was ordered to be collected and deposited at Concord.

On the 10th of December the first Provincial Congress recommended that a new Congress be chosen, to assemble at Cambridge, on the 1st of February, 1775, and dissolved.

The new Congress, which met at Cambridge on the 1st of February, was not so numerous as the one previous. There were *forty* from Middlesex, and from other counties in proportion. They continued in session until the 16th, and on that day adjourned to meet at Concord on the 22d of March.

Congress met at Concord according to adjournment, and continued a laborious and important session till the 15th of April, when they adjourned, to meet at the same place on the 10th of May, *unless sooner called together*. The Committee of Safety, chosen at the first Congress, were in session during the recess, and it was made the duty of the members in Cambridge and the vicinity, to call an earlier meeting, if necessary. In consequence of the events of the 19th of April, notice was given by the members in Cambridge, and a meeting of a few members was suddenly called at Concord, on the 22d of April, when Richard Devens, Esq. of Charlestown was chosen chairman, and John Murray, clerk,\* and immediately adjourned to Watertown. At this ses-

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\* We believe this person to be the Rev. John Murray, a Presbyterian minister of Newburyport, who was sent as a delegate to the Congress.

sion a committee of nine persons was chosen to take depositions respecting the affair at Lexington on the 19th; of which committee were Colonel James Barrett of Concord, and Deacon Jonas Stone of Lexington, who were also members of the Congress. There was also another committee appointed to draw up a narrative of the whole of the events of that day. Joseph Warren, Esq. occasionally presided in this Congress, the Honorable John Hancock having been previously chosen a representative in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia.\*

From the foregoing statements the reason is obvious why Concord was selected as a place of deposit for the Provincial military stores, and why the expedition of the British troops to that place was undertaken.

“In the afternoon of the 18th,” says the history of Major Phinney, “General Gage sent out a number of his officers, a part of them through Roxbury, and a part over the ferry through Charlestown, to reconnoitre and watch the movements of the people, and, at a proper time, to seize and detain all persons on the road whom they might suspect of being engaged in carrying intelligence of the intended march of his troops to Concord. Solomon Brown of Lexington, who had been to market at Boston on the 18th, returned late in the afternoon, and informed Colonel William Munroe, then an orderly sergeant of the militia company, that he had seen nine British officers, dressed in blue great coats, passing leisurely up the road, sometimes before and sometimes behind him, armed, as he had discovered by the occasional blowing aside of their great coats. Munroe, suspecting their intention was to seize Hancock and Adams, immediately collected a guard of eight men, well armed and equipped, and placed them, with himself at their head, at the house of Mr. Clark, which was about a quarter of a mile from the main road leading to Concord. The Committee of Safety, then in session in the westerly part of Cambridge, also sent information to Hancock and Adams of the approach of these officers. They

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\* The above Congress, continuing in session but a short time, dissolved, and a third and last Congress was chosen, composed principally of the members of the second Congress, and met at Watertown on the 31st of May. Chose Joseph Warren, Esq. President, and Mr. Samuel Freeman, Secretary, and continued the session to the 13th of July, when they dissolved. A “General Court,” chosen according to the colony charter, assembled in August.

passed through town early in the evening on the road to Concord. After some consultation, it was concluded by the persons present to send three of their number, Saunders, Brown, and Loring, toward Concord, to watch the British officers, and endeavour to ascertain and give information of their movements. In the borders of Lincoln the whole three were taken prisoners by the British officers. During the time they held our men in custody, they took two other prisoners, Colonel Paul Revere, and one Allen, a pedlar," whose hands were crippled and distorted. "Shortly after, they released Allen. They also attempted to stop a young man, by the name of Prescott, belonging to Concord; but, being well mounted, he turned from the road into the field, and putting spurs to his horse, escaped. Several of the officers pursued, but could not overtake him."

"At about 10 o'clock in the evening of the 18th, a detachment of British troops, consisting of grenadiers and light infantry, in all about eight hundred, embarked from Boston in boats, and landed at Lechmere Point in Cambridge, just as the moon rose. To prevent discovery they took a by-path leading to the main road, which obliged them to wade through marshy places and water to a considerable depth."

Governor Gage, by posting sentinels, endeavoured to prevent the carrying intelligence of the embarkation of the troops into the country. But nothing of the kind could escape the notice of the vigilant and active General Warren and his compatriots. Colonel Revere and a Mr. Lincoln had been seasonably sent out of Boston, to give information to Hancock and Adams, and to others, of the movement of the British troops, and what might be expected. Revere and Lincoln, one through Charlestown, the other through Roxbury, met at Lexington. "They both brought written communications from General Warren, that a large body of the king's troops (supposed to be a brigade of twelve or fifteen hundred men) had embarked in boats, and gone over to Lechmere Point, and it was suspected they were ordered to seize and destroy the stores belonging to the colony, then deposited at Concord. The march of the British troops was silent and rapid." A little before 5 o'clock, A. M. they arrived at Lexington, near the meeting-house, and in sight of the militia there collected. And there, for the present, we leave them, and the horrid massacre they perpetrated, and pass on to the entrance of the British into Concord and the scenes that followed.



Nothing very interesting occurred in the march of the British from Lexington to Concord. Intelligence had been given by Mr. Samuel Prescott, who had passed the evening at Lexington, and had seen and escaped the British officers on the road, as abovementioned, that the British troops were on the way, and supposed to be destined to this place, for the purpose of destroying public and military stores; which intelligence was confirmed by others who were passing the road, and particularly by Mr. Reuben Brown of Concord, who had been sent to Lexington on purpose to ascertain the truth of the case.

About 1 o'clock in the morning of the 19th, the bell in Concord was rung, which was to be the signal of alarm. The inhabitants of the town hastily collected, and the minute companies and militia, with patriotic ardor, expeditiously formed on the usual parade before the meeting-house. Several men now living, who were then in the military companies, are of opinion that there were two hundred men\* in arms that day, belonging to Concord. A considerable number of them were ordered to assist the citizens who were actively engaged in removing and secreting cannon, military stores, and provisions. The cannon were nearly all conveyed to a distance, some to adjacent towns, and some were buried in the ground, and some under heaps of manure.

The minute company of Lincoln, commanded by Capt. William Smith and Lieut. Samuel Hoar, long since the Hon. Samuel Hoar; and the militia company commanded by Capt. Samuel Farrar, now living, and many years a deacon, assembled on the common with those of Concord. With others from that town was the late Col. Abijah Pierce, then a Major in a regiment in that section of the county. These companies of Concord and Lincoln marched down the road towards Lexington, till they saw the British advancing within two miles of the centre of the town. Mr. James Baker, then of Lincoln, a minute-man, and engaged all day, still lives and recollects the events and transactions here narrated.

One reason for the early assembling of the companies of Lincoln was, that they received the first information of the British by Mr. Prescott, who, in escaping the British officers, turned his

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\* We have the names of one hundred volunteer minute-men who were enrolled that day, besides the militia.

course through Lincoln. It may not be amiss to observe that, in every town where minute companies were organized, they felt themselves specially obliged to be well armed, and to appear on parade as soon as possible, at the first notice of danger from the British soldiery; being voluntarily and by recommendation of the general Committee of Safety formed into companies and regiments for this purpose. On this account, we find these companies with their officers more forward and conspicuous than the militia. This was their duty; and their being in front, where danger was the greatest, implies no want of patriotism or zeal in the militia officers or companies.

The officers of the regiment of minute-men in and about Concord, now remembered, were Col. James Barrett, Lieut. Col. Ezekiel Howe of Sudbury, Major John Buttrick and Captains David Brown and Charles Miles of Concord, Capt. Isaac Davis and Lieuts. J. Hayward and John Heald of Acton, and Adjutant Joseph Hosmer, late the Hon. Joseph Hosmer, who magnified his office by his activity and zeal, and animated the spirits of his fellow-soldiers by his patriotic address. Other officers and private citizens of influence, contributed, by their exhortations and example, to invigorate and direct the spirits and courage of the people. Capt. Nathan Barrett, late Colonel, commanded the militia company of Concord, and marched next to the minute companies, when the fight commenced. Several of this company are now living.

When the alarm-bell was heard, the Rev. Mr. Emerson, the clergyman of the town, turned out with his people. He was a zealous patriot, and entered warmly into the cause of his country. He encouraged the people collected, and administered counsel and comfort to the distressed and flying women and children. The next year he went as Chaplain in the northern army, and died of sickness on his way home.

That night was a time of great anxiety, and big with doubtful and interesting expectations. The novelty of the scene, the distress of some, the ardor of others, the uncertainty of the events, and the unknown consequences that must follow, all conspired to render those few hours extremely anxious and painful.

Col. James Barrett had the command of the military companies, and also of the superintendence of all the public stores,

by the appointment of Congress.\* He rode from place to place, giving directions to soldiers and citizens as circumstances required. Great confidence was reposed in him, both by his fellow-citizens and the Provincial Congress.

The military companies which had marched eastward in sight of the approaching enemy, finding they were in number far inferior to the British, returned, most of them on the hill, north of the road. And when they came to the west end by the road leading to the north bridge, Col. Barrett addressed them in a firm, feeling, and serious manner. He reminded them of the danger to which they were exposed, and cautioned them not to be careless, or needlessly expose themselves; but to be cool and firm, and to conduct like considerate and judicious men and patriots. He charged them not to fire, unless the British should first fire on them. Perceiving that the British had entered the village, and were very near them, and that his men were too few to make a stand, he ordered them to march over the north bridge, and take a position on a hill about one mile to the north of the meeting-house, and there to wait for accessions to their numbers, and for further orders. Nor did they wait in vain. Armed men from adjacent towns hastened to this place of general rendezvous. A considerable number of the minute and militia companies of Bedford were seasonably on the ground. The former was commanded by Capt. Jonathan Wilson, the latter by Capt. John Moore. Capt. Wilson was killed in Lincoln, by the flank guard of the enemy. Two of the company of Capt. Wilson, who were with him, are now living, viz. Captains Christopher Page and David Reed, and retain a lively remembrance of the novel and tragical scenes of that day. Numbers from Carlisle, Chelmsford, Westford, Littleton, and Acton, augmented the military force. A company from Westford had just entered the bounds of Concord when the fight took place. But individuals of that town were present and engaged in the battle, among whom was the brave Col. Robinson. A company from Sudbury commanded by Capt. Nixon, afterwards a general in the Continental army, were stopped about half a mile from

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\* Here let it be noted, that in the numbers of "Middlesex," published in 1826, in the Yeoman's Gazette, there are several errors respecting men and circumstances, which are here rectified; more accurate information having been obtained.

the south bridge, by a messenger, Mr. Stephen Barrett, son of the Colonel, and informed that the south bridge was taken up and guarded by the British, and that they must march round to the north bridge. In this route they had to pass by Col. Barrett's, where the British were then actually destroying public property. The company halted near the British, and Lieut. Col. Howe, anxious to join his regiment, concealed his sword under his coat, and pretending business, obtained leave of the British officer commanding that party, to pass unmolested. He had gone but a little way, when the firing at the bridge was heard, on which he turned back, offering a reason for not proceeding; and, receiving an angry threat from the officer, rejoined the Sudbury company,\* and pursued the enemy in their retreat from Concord. Col. Jonathan Rice of Sudbury, now living, then a lieutenant in that company, correctly remembers and relates these things. A Mr. Plimpton of the same town, now alive, is a witness to the same facts. Two companies from Stow, commanded by Captains Hapgood and Whitcomb, marched for Concord at 12 o'clock, passed the north bridge, and arrived at Cambridge at sunset.

We now advert to the British troops, who entered the centre of the town in two divisions; one in the main road, and the other on the hill which is north of the road, and from which the armed Americans had just retired. Their first act of violence was to cut down the *liberty* pole, which afterwards they burnt with the carriages of the cannon and other public property.

Immediately after entering the village, six companies, under Captains Parsons and Lowrie, were sent to the north bridge, and a party to the south bridge under Captain Pole. Their object was, doubtless, to prevent the entrance of people into the town, while they were carrying on the work of destruction which they had hastily commenced. Public stores and implements of war being deposited at Colonel Barrett's, three companies, commanded by Capt. Parsons, marched over the bridge, and on to Col. Barrett's. It is highly probable that they meant

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\* In that company was a Deacon Josiah Haynes, 80 years of age. He was urgent to attack the British at the south bridge, to dislodge them, and march into the village. This is a specimen of the spirit and feelings of the people. He pursued with ardor to Lexington, and there was killed by a musket-ball.

to take the Colonel and carry him a prisoner to Boston ; for he was known by Governor Gage and the royal party to be a public officer and an influential character in the cause of liberty.

After the military companies had taken a stand on the hill, as above mentioned, Colonel Barrett immediately rode home, gave directions to his family, and left them without telling them where he was going. Apprehensive that the British would seize him, if they had an opportunity, he took a back way, and returned to his brethren in arms. By this method he avoided meeting the British, and his family could give them no account of him.

The British troops were very expeditious in destroying all the public stores they could find. A considerable quantity of flour was stored in the malt-house of Mr. Ebenezer Hubbard. They beat off the boards of one end of the house, rolled down the barrels, dashed them in pieces, and scattered the flour in the street. At a store-house of Capt. Timothy Wheeler, there was also a quantity of flour, which was saved by the following artifice. By the side of the barrels two bags of meal were placed, which were the property of Capt. Wheeler. The British were about to break open the store, but Capt. Wheeler readily produced the key and opened the door. On being sternly interrogated, whether that flour was public property, Capt. Wheeler, standing by the bags, replied, "Gentlemen, I am a miller, and declare to you, that every gill of *this* is mine," at the same instant striking his hand on the bags of meal. Upon this they left him in quiet possession of the whole quantity of flour. At a grist-mill near by, a number of barrels were found, which they threw into the mill-pond ; a part of which was saved afterwards, though considerably damaged. About this time, the British set fire to the court-house, which was near to a number of buildings, and among them the house of widow Moulton. On seeing the fire, she ran out and remonstrated, and obtained by a hearing and assistance to bring water and extinguish the fire.

While in the village, the British seized and abused several persons, aged men, who were not armed. Among them was Dea. Thomas Barrett, brother of the Colonel. In his buildings there was a gun-factory, carried on by his son, Mr. Samuel Barrett, and men employed by him. The Deacon was a man noted for his piety and goodness, and for his mildness of disposition.

Not appearing terrified or insulting, he began seriously to remonstrate against their violence, and the unkind treatment of the mother country against her colonies. When they threatened to kill him as a rebel, he calmly said, they would do better to save themselves that trouble, for he was old and should soon die of himself. Upon which they replied, "Well, old daddy, you may go in peace."

By the time the British had collected, burnt, and otherwise destroyed the carriages of cannon, public stores, and the *liberty* pole, and had spiked several cannon which they found, and thrown cannon-balls into the mill-pond, the firing took place at the north bridge, which immediately drew their anxious attention to that quarter.

The British troops, which went on to Colonel Barrett's, found and burnt a number of carriages for cannon, and other implements of war. The soldiers were hungry and thirsty; and here, as at other places in town, when disbanded, they requested supplies. The officers very politely offered to pay Mrs. Barrett for victuals and drink, but she refused pay, saying, "We are commanded to feed our enemy, if he hunger." They assured her of good treatment, but said they must search her house and should destroy public stores. Mrs. Barrett had concealed the small articles that belong to cannon, with musket balls, flints, cutlasses, &c., in casks in the garret, and had put over them a quantity of feathers which prevented discovery. On seeing a son of Colonel Barrett, the officers demanded his name. Being answered, Barrett, they called him a rebel, and taking hold of him, said, "You must go to Boston with us." Mrs. Barrett spoke and said, "He is my son, and not the master of the house." Upon this they released him. Another son was there, viz. the late James Barrett, Esq., but, being lame and inactive at that time, did not so much attract their attention. They were about to burn the devoted articles, carriages, &c. so near to the barn as to endanger it. Observing this, Mrs. Barrett went out to them, and reminded the officers of their promise not to injure private property. They promptly ordered the articles to be carried into the street, where they were consumed.

The party of regulars at the north bridge were, for a little time, dispersed about; and some of them went into the houses that were near, and procured food and drink, which were generally given them from fear, if not from kindness.

In the mean time, the number of armed Americans was augmented, and they had marched to the high land near the north bridge, at the northwest of it. From this station, the centre of the town was in fair view, and the British at the bridge were before their eyes and within gunshot. Here the military companies formed; and when in this position, Captain Davis of Ac-ton arrived, and brought on his company; and passing by the other companies, took the *right* of the whole, which placed him nearest the bridge, and in front, when they marched towards the enemy.

About four hundred and fifty armed men being collected, the military officers then present, with some respectable volunteers and citizens, having confidence in the patriotism and courage of the men in arms, and trusting in Divine Providence, there held a *Council of war*, — a council the most interesting and pregnant with events, perhaps, that ever was held. It was not indeed precisely according to the rules of a regular army; — it was a council composed of military officers, volunteers, and citizens, the proprietors of the soil, the substantial yeomanry of the then Province. *That* council, with minds and hearts full of the great occasion of assembling, having directly before them a body of British soldiers, at the bridge, stationed there to oppose their entrance into their own village; knowing that a detachment of regulars had gone over the bridge to Colonel Barrett's, where public stores were deposited; not having heard that blood was shed at Lexington, but only that there had been firing; seeing the smoke rising in the centre of the town, and the proud banners of the invading troops of the mother country there waving; the women and children either flying, or in a state of terror and anguish not easily described; feeling that it was a case of extremity, a question of life or death, of freedom or slavery; and conscious that the halter would follow ineffectual resistance; in that solemn and appalling situation, enough to "try men's souls"; *that council* of sober, intelligent, high-minded patriots consult, ed, <sup>s</sup>determined, and *resolved to live free or die*, — resolved "to march into the middle of the town for its defence, or die in the attempt." \* — They resolved also, that they would do no violence, unless violently opposed; that not a gun should be fired by an

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\* Major Buttrick and Captain Davis used this expression, as numbers testify; — an expression, which many thought and acted out.

American, unless fired upon by the British. — They acted upon principle, and in the fear of God. — Captain Miles, afterwards, said to one of us, that “he went to the services of the day with the same seriousness and acknowledgment of God which he carried to church.” And we have no doubt, he expressed the sentiments and feelings of many who were engaged in the bloody scenes of that memorable day. Indeed it was a sentiment that pervaded the great body of the people. The happy effects and vast consequences of their high and noble resolution, are beyond all calculation. There the sentiments and feelings of the people were brought to a point, — *the point of forcible resistance*. Their minds had been long agitated and their feelings insulted. They had marked the oppressive measures of Great Britain, and now saw violence and destruction actually begun by her troops. Forbearance was no longer a virtue. The moment had arrived, — the die must be cast, — and they came to a glorious decision. To that result we may trace not only the American revolution, but the existence and progress of civil liberty and national freedom in various parts of the world. Where *that great council* was held, the spot, the site of ground, appears to us little less than holy, and really consecrated by Heaven to the cause of liberty and the rights of man. And, we trust, it will never cease to remind succeeding generations of what their fathers bravely resolved and achieved, and what the Almighty wonderfully performed for them and their posterity. When the scenes of that day, and the situation of the principal actors are distinctly recollected, we admire and venerate the character and conduct of those patriots, and we delight to honor and perpetuate their memory.

It is impossible, at this period, to do impartial justice to all the officers, soldiers, and citizens at that time assembled. The officers were of course the most known and conspicuous, and their names are transmitted to posterity with honor. But there were subalterns, privates, and volunteer citizens, whose patriotism and bravery, on that day of deep interest and high consideration, covered them with honor, and merit the unceasing gratitude of their country.

It may gratify the reader to know the geography of the field of action before we describe the action itself. From the station of the armed Americans on the high land, the direction of the



road was southwardly till it met the road leading over the bridge. At this point, on the left bank of the river, the road to the bridge turned northeasterly, so that the point, or angle of the roads, the bridge, and the high land form a triangle of nearly equal sides. The course of the river through the town is serpentine. A few rods above the bridge, the river turns to the north, and soon again to the east, about one hundred rods below the bridge.

The Americans being ready and determined to move on towards the bridge, orders were renewed by the officers not to fire nor give any needless provocation, unless fired upon by the British; to which all assented. Colonel Barrett\* then gave orders to march, and directed Major John Buttrick to take the command and to lead the companies. He was accompanied by the heroic Colonel Robinson, who was a volunteer and belonged to a regiment of which the gallant Prescott of Pepperell was first Colonel. Captain Davis followed them with his company, then Captain David Brown and Captain Charles Miles with their companies. Captain Nathan Barrett next followed with his militia company. The Captains from Lincoln and Bedford, above named, fell in under the direction of Colonel Barrett, who continued on horseback, in the rear, giving directions to the armed men collecting and momentarily increasing in number. The precise position of every officer and company, and parts of compa-

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\* The following is the deposition of Colonel Barrett, given before the Committee of the Provincial Congress:—

*Lexington, April 23, 1775.*

“I, James Barrett, of Concord, Colonel of a regiment of militia in the county of Middlesex, do testify and say, that on Wednesday morning last, about day-break, I was informed of the approach of a number of the regular troops to the town of Concord, where were some magazines belonging to the Province, and where there was assembled some of the militia of that and the neighbouring towns, when I ordered them to march to the north bridge and pass the same, but not to fire on the king's troops, unless they were fired upon. We advanced near said bridge, when the said troops fired upon our militia and killed two men upon the spot, and wounded several others, which was the first firing of guns in the town of Concord. My detachment then returned the fire, which killed and wounded several of the king's troops.

JAMES BARRETT.

Sworn to before WILLIAM REED,  
JOHN HASTINGS, } Justices of the Peace.”  
DUNCAN INGRAM, }

Colonel Barrett died suddenly April 11, 1779, aged 69.

nies, cannot now be perfectly known. The forward companies became more noticeable.

It may not be amiss to remark that the situation of Major Buttrick, as it was more dangerous and important, has gained him distinguished celebrity and honor. But this ought never to operate as an eclipse upon any other officer on that occasion. There is satisfactory evidence, that on the march to meet the enemy, Major Buttrick requested Colonel Robinson to act as his superior, he being an older man, and of higher rank in another regiment. But he modestly declined, and consented to march at the right hand and be considered a volunteer. The late Colonel John Buttrick, then a fifer, repeatedly affirmed that he was present and heard the conversation between his father and Colonel Robinson. This is here particularly mentioned, because there have been entertained erroneous opinions on the subject.

The Americans commenced their march in double file. The British observing their motions, hastily formed on the east side of the river. When the Americans passed the angle near the river, the British began to take up the planks of the bridge; against which Major Buttrick remonstrated in an elevated voice, and ordered a quicker step of his soldiers. On this the British desisted from injury to the bridge, convinced, no doubt, that the Americans were determined and able to pass the bridge. At that moment two or three guns, in quick succession, were fired into the river on the right of the Americans, who considered them as alarm guns, and not aimed at them. In a minute or two, the Americans being in quick motion, and within *ten* or *fifteen* rods of the bridge, a single gun was fired by a British soldier, which marked its way, passing under Colonel Robinson's arm, slightly wounding the side of Luther Blanchard, a fifer in the Acton company. This gun was instantly followed by a volley, which killed Captain Davis\* and Mr. Hosmer, both of the same company. On seeing this, as quickly as possible, Major Buttrick leaped from the ground, and partly turning to his men, exclaimed, "*Fire, fellow-soldiers, for God's sake, fire.*" Mr. Tilly Buttrick, a respectable man now living, stood near the Major, and is positive that he distinctly heard the words and saw

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\* Captain Davis was 30 years old, and left a wife and five children. His widow has since been twice married, and now lives a widow in Acton.

the motions of the speaker. He was in front of Captain Brown's company. No sooner were the words uttered, than the word *fire* ran like electricity through the whole line of the Americans, extending to the high land from whence they had marched; and for a few seconds, the word *fire, fire*, was heard from hundreds of mouths. The order of Major Buttrick was instantly obeyed. Two of the British were killed and several wounded. The firing on each side lasted but a minute or two. The British immediately retreated. When the Americans had fired, most of the forward companies leaped over a wall on the left and fired from behind it. Military order and regularity of proceeding were soon after broken up. A part of the Americans rushed over the bridge, and pursued the British till they saw a large reinforcement advancing, when they turned to the left, and ascended a hill east of the main road; and a part returned to the high ground, conveying and taking care of the dead.

While the Americans were retiring and scattered on the heights, the British troops which had gone to Colonel Barrett's, returned unmolested and joined their main body. When they saw two of their fellow-soldiers dead, near the bridge, they appeared to be very much alarmed, and ran with great speed. It was a sight evidently unexpected to them, and led them to anticipate the danger and blood-shed that followed. Their conduct was observed by the Rev. Mr. Emerson and his family, who had witnessed the whole tragical scene from the windows of his house near the battle-ground.

A few minutes after the fight at the bridge, a guard of British troops, stationed near the place where they first entered the village, saw a man riding briskly towards them, whom they sharply eyed. This man was Mr. Abel Prescott, who had been to give intelligence to the inhabitants of Sudbury, and was returning to his father's, the late Doctor Abel Prescott. Perceiving that he was watched, and that by pressing forward he should be likely to fall into their hands, he turned his horse about, on which they fired upon him, and wounded him in one arm. He rode directly to the house of Mrs. Heywood, who with her son-in-law, now the Honorable Abiel Heywood, and a living witness of this affair, quickly attended to his wound. But observing the British advancing to the house, Mrs. Heywood, an aged lady, and her son-in-law left it, and sought a place of greater safety. — Mr. Prescott

ran up stairs and concealed himself in a dark place, behind the chimney and a dry cask. He heard them searching for him and uttering bitter threats, but they did not find him.

While this party of the enemy were at this house, they observed a number of Americans running across lots towards a barn. At these men several guns were fired, but without effect.

Some persons, it is quite possible, may judge these things too trivial to be here recorded. But it appears to us that scarcely any event or circumstance relating to the conduct of the British or Americans, on that day, can be viewed as uninteresting. We wish to place the scenes of the day before the present and future generations precisely as they existed.

After the fight the British hastily collected their scattered parties, and commenced their retreat nearly at 12 o'clock. They took a horse and chaise and some blankets from Mr. Reuben Brown, to convey, as is believed, a wounded officer, Lieutenant Potter. The horse and chaise were left at West Cambridge, where the officer was left a prisoner, and received kind attentions from a number of American gentlemen.

The bloody conflict at the bridge being over, and the Americans fatigued and hungry, having had no regular, if any breakfast, many of them improved this interval to take refreshment. Mr. Thaxter went to the house of the Rev. Mr. Emerson. The former gentleman was then a candidate for the ministry, and late the reverend and venerable pastor of a church at Edgerton, Martha's Vineyard. He was then preaching at Westford, and accompanied Colonel Robinson that morning, and was an eye-witness of the fight, and of the retreat and pursuit. He was an ardent patriot, and he lived to realize the happy fruits of patriotic zeal and love of liberty.

After a little respite, Colonel Barrett and others rallied and encouraged their armed brethren to pursue their retreating enemy.\* Being recovered from the shock at first occasioned by the novel and bloody scene, they engaged in this service with ardor and spirits, heightened by the violence and bloody action they had witnessed. Most of the armed Americans took a nearer route across the fields, and overtook the enemy as they passed

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\* The two British soldiers killed at the bridge were buried near the spot where they fell, both in one grave. Two rough stones mark the spot where they were laid. Their names were unknown. Several others were buried in the middle of the town.

the road from Bedford. There they met a body of minute-men, commanded by Major John Brooks, late Governor, whose Colonel was the late General Ebenezer Bridge of Chelmsford, and who had previously joined the pursuing Americans. Colonel William Thompson of Billerica, with a body of militia from that town and vicinity, came up to the contest on the Bedford road, a few minutes after Major Brooks, and was brave and efficient in pursuit. About this period and place, the company from East Sudbury, and individuals in that quarter, came up to the attack on the south side of the road. A little below the Bedford road, on Merriam's corner, so called, there was a sharp action, and several of the British were killed. The enemy faced about and made a stand, but soon resumed their march of retreat. The late Rev. Edmund Foster, of Littleton, was a volunteer from Reading, and accompanied Major Brooks, and was personally and warmly engaged in the conflicts of the afternoon. His narrative is interesting, and the principal part of it is in the following pages.

After the action above mentioned, little more was done by fighting, until the enemy had reached the high land in Lincoln. At that place there was a large bend in the road towards the north, and a grove of great trees on the west, and high bushes on the east, and stone-walls in every direction. The Americans had run singly across the meadows, and concealed themselves behind the walls and trees. On the east side of the road there were many in ambush. In this situation the Americans poured a deadly fire upon the British. Near the close of this action, and a little farther on, Captain Wilson and a number with him, who had taken a stand behind a barn, were killed by the flank-guard of the enemy. From this time, there was a general though not entire cessation of firing, until the enemy had entered the bounds of Lexington, when Captain Parker's company attacked the British from the woods on the south of the road. When the enemy were rising Fiske's hill in the west part of Lexington, they were very hardly pressed, the Americans having run forward and placed themselves advantageously behind trees and fences. The British faced about, and a very spirited and bloody contest ensued. Here Major Pitcairn was wounded and

unhorsed: his horse, pistols, &c. were taken.\* At this place a considerable number were killed and wounded on both sides, but chiefly on the side of the British. They were more exposed and more compact; and it is wonderful that a greater number were not killed and wounded. Here we adduce the account of the Rev. Mr. Foster, who was present at the place, and personally engaged. This will confirm the preceding narrative, and substantiate facts in the further retreat of the enemy. In a letter to Colonel Daniel Shattuck of Concord, dated, Littleton, March 10th, 1825, he wrote as follows:

“On the morning of the 19th of April, 1775, just at sunrise, *Alarm Guns* were fired, which were quickly followed by a post bringing news, that the Regulars, as they expressed it, had gone to Concord. I ran directly to Major Brooks, late Governor, — asked if he were going to *Concord*, and *when*. ‘Immediately,’ was the answer. I borrowed accoutrements, and we set off together for Concord. The militia company of Reading marched on at the same time, under the command of Captain Bachelder. We rendezvoused near the middle of the town of Bedford; left horses and marched forward in pursuit of the enemy. A little before we came to Merriam’s hill, we discovered the enemy’s flank-guard, of about 80 or 100 men, who, on their retreat from Concord, kept that height of land, the main body in the road. The British troops and the Americans,† at that time, were equally distant from Merriam’s corner. About twenty rods short of that place, the Americans made a halt. The British marched down the hill with very slow, but steady step, without music or a word being spoken that could be heard. Silence reigned on both sides. As soon as the British had gained the main road,‡ and passed a small bridge near that corner, they faced about suddenly, and fired a volley of musketry upon us. They overshot; and no one, to my knowledge, was injured by the fire. The fire was immediately returned by the Americans,

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\* The horse was taken to Concord and sold by auction. Captain Nathan Barrett bought the pistols, and afterwards offered them to General Washington, but, he not accepting them, they were given to General Putnam.

† Here he must mean the Americans with Major Brooks, and, perhaps, Colonel Thompson. Those in the fight had scarcely arrived, and were west of the enemy.

‡ When the large flank-guard had joined the main body in the road.

and two British soldiers fell dead at a little distance from each other, in the road near the brook. The battle now began, and was carried on with little or no military discipline and order, on the part of the Americans, during the remainder of that day. Each one sought his own place and opportunity to attack and annoy the enemy from behind trees, rocks, fences, and buildings, as seemed most convenient.

“The enemy retreated and were followed. We saw a wood at a distance, which appeared to lie on or near the road the enemy must pass. Many leaped over the wall and made for that wood. We arrived just in time to meet the enemy. There was then, on the opposite side of the road, a young growth of wood well filled with Americans. The enemy was now completely between two fires, renewed and briskly kept up. They ordered out a flank-guard on the left to dislodge the Americans from their posts behind large trees: but they only became a better mark to be shot at. A short but sharp contest ensued, in which the enemy received more deadly injury, than at any one place from Concord to Charlestown. Eight or more of their number were killed on the spot, and, no doubt, many wounded.\*

“The enemy soon retreated under a scattering fire, in which one of their musicians fell. About mid-way of the plain in Lincoln, they left in the road one of their soldiers badly wounded. When we had advanced near to Benjamin’s tavern, a man rode up on horseback, but unarmed. The enemy were then passing round the hill just below the tavern. They had posted a small body of their troops on the north side of the hill, which fired upon us. The horse and his rider fell instantly to the ground; the horse died immediately, but the man received no injury. We were quickly at the spot, from which we returned the fire. The enemy were then rising and passing over Fiske’s hill. An officer mounted on an elegant horse, with a drawn sword in his hand, was riding backwards and forwards, commanding and urging on the British troops. A number of Americans behind a pile of rails, raised their guns and fired with deadly effect. The officer fell, and the horse took fright, leaped the wall, and ran directly towards those who had killed his

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\* This action took place on the old road north of the school-house below Patch’s tavern. Eight of these British soldiers were buried in Lincoln burying-ground. ✓

rider.\* The enemy discharged their musketry in that direction, but their fire took no effect.

“At the next house, a British soldier and an American met each other suddenly face to face. Both presented their guns and fired at the same instant. The fire of both took a deadly effect.† In some old buildings beyond Thaddeus Reed’s, two or three wounded British soldiers were lodged. The fire on the enemy now came from all directions. At the bottom of the next hill, and near the Lexington almshouse, a British soldier was wounded.” By Mr. Foster’s account, he saved the life of this soldier, and humanely assisted in conveying him and two other Britons badly wounded, to Buckman’s, now Merriam’s tavern, where proper care was taken of them. “Now Lord Percy came up with a reinforcement of one thousand men and two pieces of artillery, united with the troops from Concord, and took post on the high grounds a little distant from Colonel Munroe’s. Here for a while was a cessation of arms, excepting that the British occasionally fired their field-pieces on us.” The Rev. gentleman goes on to mention a number of facts, too well known to need repeating; such as the burning of several buildings by the British — the Americans taking refreshment — the manner in which they were supplied by the citizens in the several towns who did not bear arms — the passing of a cannon-ball through the Lexington church — the beating to arms again — the renewal of the retreat of the British, and of the pursuit of the Americans, &c. He relates a feat of his, with two others, very much to his credit, in taking a prisoner, who was shot through the body, but recovered. He continues: “This transaction put me so far in the rear, that though I pursued, I did not come up with the main body. After the British forces left Lexington, they were met and mostly opposed by men from the lower towns, and some from the county of Essex. The company from Danvers, unacquainted with military movements, was caught somewhere in West Cambridge, between the flank-guard and the main body of the enemy, and lost eight of their number, and several more were severely wounded. This transaction I did not witness,

1. 2. 3. 4. \* We suppose Major Pitcairn was the officer, who was only wounded, having his arm broken.  
 † The American was Mr. Hayward of Acton. The Briton had been plundering, and had just left the house as Hayward came upon him.



but was correctly informed of it. At Snow's, now Davenport's tavern in Cambridge, one of the enemy lay dead by the road, and directly opposite, one of our best men, Major Gardner, of Brookline, was killed, whose death was much lamented.

“ Being now sufficiently weary, I took shelter, (not lodgings, for the furniture was all carried off,) in Snow's tavern for the night.

“ Though almost half a century has elapsed since these events took place, yet my memory has been refreshed with them as often as I have passed by the places where the deeds were done, and therefore I have now as perfect a knowledge of them as though they had been the works of yesterday.

“ With the most ardent wishes for the prosperity of the American Independence, which I have lived to see established, and for many years have participated in ; and with personal respect for yourself,

I subscribe, your friend and fellow-citizen,

EDMUND FOSTER.”

None of the inhabitants of Concord were killed in the pursuit of the enemy, and very few were wounded. Captain C. Miles was injured in one hand by a musket-ball, and Captain Nathan Barrett slightly wounded.

To substantiate the many facts and circumstances brought to view in this narrative, we might adduce many living witnesses ; but we deem it unnecessary. We might also avail ourselves of this publication, to take a conspicuous stand in respect to patriotic spirit, services, and sacrifices ; and we doubt not our records would justify our pretensions. But this might appear ostentatious in the view of many persons, and like seeking preëminence among equals. All the towns in the county deserved well of their country, and exhibited their patriotism as occasion required. Some old people believe that more hardships were endured, more losses sustained, and more sacrifices made in the revolutionary war, than the present and succeeding generations will ever fully know and appreciate.

But it is time to return to the distressing scene of blood and massacre at Lexington, on the morning of that day, the events of which we have been narrating. The circumstances of that horrid scene will be fully exhibited by numerous testimonies, while we shall show that the firing of the British troops on the militia company of Lexington was not, that morning, returned by said company ; which is one object of this publication.

We have no hesitation in expressing our full belief, that the inhabitants of Lexington, on that morning of alarm and novel excitement, conducted as honorably and bravely as any people would in like circumstances. They enjoyed one singular advantage in a time so trying, viz. the inspiring presence of two of the most distinguished leaders and politicians of that period, the Honorable John Hancock and Samuel Adams. The militia company under Captain Parker were prompt, patriotic, and courageous to admiration. That a single company should parade, in an opposing attitude, directly in the face of nearly one thousand of the picked troops of Great Britain, places their courage and firmness beyond all controversy. Some may think they were not so wise in council, as fearless in danger,—not so prudent in action, as zealous in patriotism. But while we cheerfully give them the highest praise for their courage and love of country and of liberty, *we deny that they returned the fire of the British at the time.* We think it quite possible that the firing on the British in their retreat from Concord, and in the afternoon, in which the Lexington company were active, may have been blended, in the minds of some, with the scenes of the morning. *This* method and time of returning the fire of the British has been so often narrated, perhaps without needful distinctions, that the present inhabitants may have connected the two periods, and even been wrought into the belief that the British fire was actually returned behind the church in the morning.

We will grant that *after* the British had formed at the western extremity of the parade ground, and actually taken up their march towards Concord, a man, behind the tavern of Mr. Buckman, did actually discharge his gun towards the British. But this was at such a distance as to have no effect, nor even to be heard by the enemy. We will grant further that, "*some very few*" of the militia, being in a state of high excitement and confusion, *after the British had gone on their way*, did fire off their guns from behind the wall, in the places of their concealment. But in our opinion this is *nothing* to the purpose, and does not affect the question at issue, though it gives opportunity for perplexing it. In this way we account for the testimonies, on oath, of a number of the inhabitants of Lexington, to a fact which, we believe, never existed. The reasons of our unbelief shall be assigned. To this confused and undefined state of things, we may trace the reports and publications in England and elsewhere, that the

militia company of Lexington fired upon the British, on the parade, in the morning. Considering the disposition of the British and of the *tories* at that time, it is not wonderful that such reports should have been circulated, and every advantage seized upon to criminate the Americans. It is well known that General Gage published an official account of the action soon after it occurred. In this account he speaks of the Americans as the aggressors, — as returning the fire, &c. It was soon after published in England, and English historians have received his statements as correct. Many American writers have been mere copyists of the English, and are equally erroneous. No one in this vicinity, not even the most strenuous advocate for the “*battle of Lexington*,” believes his official account, or those taken from it, to be true.\*

As to the blood said to have been seen in the street, and adduced as evidence that a Briton was wounded by the fire of an American; if blood were really seen, it is highly probable it was the blood of the dead and wounded of Captain Parker’s company, who were carried over that spot of ground into the meeting-house or tavern immediately after the British troops had marched towards Concord.†

But what trifles these are, compared with the great question in dispute! Let us, however, suppose that Captain Parker had ordered his company to return the British fire, and they had obeyed. Such a fire from nearly forty men, into a compact body of at least eight hundred, must have had great and fatal effect. Happy for Lexington they did not attempt such an unequal combat. Had the British officers supposed that guns were fired at them, there can scarcely be a doubt, the whole village would have been laid in ashes, and many of the inhabitants put to death. At that time they were haughty and self confident, and did not suppose the Americans would really fight, as they soon witnessed to their cost and confusion.

We now proceed to adduce the reasons above promised.

The present pretensions and claims of the citizens of Lexington, respecting the *returning of the fire* of the British troops, on

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\* Governor Gage seems not to believe this official account himself, for he subsequently transmitted a circumstantial account of the affair to Governor Trumbull, in which it is said, “There was no firing of the provincials till they had jumped over the wall.” Notwithstanding it was the intention of the British to prove there was firing on the part of the Americans. — *Historical Collections*.

† See Wood’s deposition in the sequel.

the morning of the 19th of April, '75, *were never made nor heard of*, until about forty-eight years after the events took place. Nothing of the kind was thought of, till very lately, by any persons in the neighbouring towns, who have lived in the vicinity of Lexington ever since the 19th of April, '75, and have heard the story often related by persons best acquainted with the facts. Several men have indeed had the impression that there was some firing by the Lexington militia; but this impression was evidently made by the facts above related, through the medium of English writers. Not a word or suggestion was heard of the returning of the fire of the British troops by the militia. *It is therefore incredible that it was a fact.*

This argument against the claims of [Lexington] appears to us invincible; and it is confirmed by the negative testimony of the Rev. Messrs. Clark, Cooke, Cushing, Woodward, Morrill, Cummings, and Adams, in their anniversary sermons, preached at Lexington on the occasion. They speak on the subject with high feeling and interest, but do not intimate that the militia returned the fire.\* It does not appear to us possible, that such uniform and entire silence could have been held, had they known or even believed it to be a fact, that the militia company did return the fire of the British on the spot where the massacre was perpetrated. And they must have known it, had it been a truth.

The oaths of Captain Parker and others before the Provincial Congress, a few days after the event, contain the same negative testimony. They testify, that they did not first fire upon the British. But why not testify that they did return the British fire, as well as testify that they did not fire first, if both were true? We are aware of the manner in which they are excused for not saying more, when under oath, on the supposition they knew more, as now it is pretended.

It is well known that the British officers endeavoured to apologize for their violent conduct by affirming that the Americans first fired upon them. To decide the question, Captain Parker and others were called before the Provincial Congress, and there made oath that they did not fire upon the British troops before the British fired upon them. And they then knew perfectly well, whether they returned the fire. Was it dangerous, dishon-

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\* The Rev. Mr. Clark has said something in his *Narrative*, that appears to militate against this assertion, which will be noticed in the sequel. We would that every thing should have its proper weight.

orable, and criminal then to resist unto blood? And did this character attach to such conduct, till the war was ended, and for nearly half a century? But the inhabitants of Lexington were willing the minute men and militia of Concord and adjacent towns should sustain all the *terrifying* consequences of returning the fire of the British, and, for a long time, to let this pass through the world for truth.\*

We shall now bring forward a number of testimonies, which tend, directly or indirectly, to prove our assertions and support our claims on the subject under consideration.

The Reverend and venerable Joseph Thaxter, chaplain at the late Bunker Hill celebration, in a letter to the Honorable John Keyes of Concord, dated Edgartown, February 24, 1825, after giving an account of the battle, at the north bridge in Concord, says, "As to fighting at Lexington, when the British marched up, I never heard or knew of any, until of late. I always understood that, on the alarm, a few had collected on the north side of the meeting-house. When the British came up and fired on them, killed several, and the rest fled. It was said at the time, that they did *not* return the fire. Much pains was taken by the British to prove that the Americans fired first. But it was, I believe, fully proved, that they did not fire a gun. At Concord Bridge the *first spark* was struck. It kindled a flame that never was extinguished, till the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, which completed the glory of the United States. The present generation little know what we went through to establish our Independence. As to a monument at Concord Bridge, I feel deeply interested. Posterity ought to know the spot where the first British blood was spilt." †

In the sentiments of this gentleman, we learn the opinion and full belief of perhaps nine tenths of his contemporaries, who had any knowledge of the transactions and events of the 19th of April.

We take this opportunity to notice and obviate an objection that has been made to an expression in the *Circular* of the Committee of the Bunker Hill Association. They say that the *first blood* was shed at Concord. Undoubtedly they meant *British* blood, which Mr. Thaxter expressly mentions. To understand

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\* Colonel Barrett testified, at the time, that the fire was returned at Concord, and did not consider it "good policy to withhold the truth." See his deposition, page 17.

† In all quotations we shall endeavour to follow the punctuation, italics, capitals, &c. of the originals. — *Editor.*

them in this sense is rational and candid. Every body knew that *American* blood was shed at Lexington, early in the morning of the day on which, a few hours after, *British* blood was shed at Concord. With this construction, the expression of the Committee is perfectly proper and correct.

The Rev. Joseph Estabrook of Athol, a native of Lexington, in a letter to the minister of Concord, under date of March 29th, 1826, writes as follows, — “After more than half a century, to the best of my recollection, I would inform you and others, that I stood in the ranks, on the parade, till Captain Parker ordered us to disperse, and till the British came nigh to us, and began to fire upon us, when I left the ranks. At that time all was confusion and distress. I did not see any one of the Lexington company fire upon the British, nor was there any order for it, that I recollect, from our Captain. But from the statement of the Committee and the testimony of some worthy individuals, I believe a few guns did return the fire on the British troops, before they left the parade, where the company was placed, on that never to be forgotten morning.” Here it is evident, the Reverend gentleman rests his belief of the firing of the militia *wholly* on the statements and testimonies of other persons, and those lately made, which we believe are not just. He neither saw nor heard of any firing on the British that morning by any of the company of which he was one, nor any orders for it. But he did hear his captain order the company to disperse, and did see the British fire upon them. Gentlemen who were at College with him, and often heard him tell the story, are ready to testify that he never gave them the idea of returning the British fire.

In the *narrative* of the Rev. Mr. Clark, which accompanies his anniversary sermon, April 19, 1776, we find nothing that militates against our position, except his opinion of the opening of the war between Great Britain and America, and one paragraph concerning the firing of the militia. He considers the violent and murderous assault of the British troops on the militia at Lexington, as “the commencement of hostilities and the opening of the war.” Taking into view the events of the day, as he sometimes does, and especially those at Concord, there is evidently truth and propriety in his opinion. But in limiting his ideas to the massacre at Lexington, we think he is far from being correct. Some persons may suppose that the horrid massacre at

Boston, on the 5th of March, 1770, was the commencement of hostilities and the opening of the war. Certainly that wound was never healed, and that event very much accelerated the war. Besides, there seems to be some difficulty in forming an idea of hostility and battle, when one party only assaults; it seems like one fighting alone. A violent attack, however, may be an important step in bringing on mutual conflict. And this was really the case. The massacre at Lexington was followed, in a few hours, by a bloody battle at Concord. But had no outrage been committed at Lexington, the British could not have accomplished their object at Concord without meeting resistance and fighting. This is proved by the facts, that *resistance* unto blood was actually made, and the armed men who made it had not then heard of the murder and bloodshed at Lexington.

The paragraph in the narrative of the Rev. Mr. Clark, to which we have referred, is in the following words; "In short, so far from *firing first* upon the king's troops, upon the most careful inquiry, it appears, that but very few of our people fired at all; and even *they* did not fire, till, after being fired upon by the troops, they were wounded themselves, or saw others killed or wounded by them, and looked upon it as next to impossible for them to escape." If we understand the Reverend gentleman, he means to give this idea, that some *very few* of the wounded of the militia, who despaired of escape with life, did fire. But which way they fired, and at what, and how long after the fire of the assailants, or whether the British had any knowledge of their firing, all is left wholly in the dark. — These unhappy sufferers were in a state of high excitement and anguish: "at that time all was confusion and distress;" and it is not probable they discharged their guns, if they did fire, in a manner to irritate or annoy the British. We will not inquire how Mr. Clark, who was not on the spot, should know things, of which Mr. Estabrook, who was one of the militia company, had no knowledge. From this paragraph, however, we believe, has chiefly grown the important claim of returning the fire of the British, to the exclusion of what was done at Concord bridge.

The Rev. Mr. Clark goes on to say; "One circumstance more before the brigade quitted Lexington, I beg leave to mention, as what may give a farther specimen of the *spirit* and *character* of the officers and men of this body of troops. After the militia company were dispersed and the firing ceased, the troops drew

up and formed in a body on the common, *fired a volley* and *gave three huzzas* by way of *triumph*, and as expressive of the *joy of victory* and the *glory of conquest*!! Of this transaction I was a witness, having, at that time, a fair view of their motions, and being at the distance of not more than 70 or 80 rods from them." Our author continues — "Whether this step was *honorary* to the detachment, or agreeable to the rules of war — or how far it was expressive of *bravery, heroism*, and true *military glory*, for 800 disciplined troops of *Great Britain*, without notice or provocation, to fall upon 60 or 70 undisciplined Americans, who neither *opposed* nor *molested* them, and *murder* some and disperse the rest, and then to give the shout and make the triumph of victory, is not for me to determine, but must be submitted to the impartial world to judge. Having thus *vanquished the party at Lexington*, the troops marched on for Concord," &c. A person reading such expressions and being unacquainted with the facts, might be induced to believe that there was at Lexington, that morning, a formal pitched battle. And yet some of his own words, the whole current of testimony, and the substance of the narrative, give very different ideas. In Mr. Clark's sermon in '76, on the occasion, he thus expresses himself; — "How shall I speak, or how describe the distress and *horror* of that *awful morn*, that gloomy day! *Yonder field* can witness the *innocent blood* of our *brethren slain*! And from thence does *their blood cry* unto God for vengeance from the ground!" In his note on *field* he says, "the field, not of battle, but of *murder and bloodshed*, where our men were fired upon by the troops." From this sentence, no one would ever think of a battle, or firing on both sides, but only of a cruel and horrid massacre. We will not undertake to reconcile expressions apparently so contradictory.

The monument in Lexington, erected "under the patronage and at the expense of the government of Massachusetts," expressly to commemorate the scenes and the sufferers of the morning of the 19th of April, '75, contains not *a word* of the returning of the fire of the British troops. Had it been a truth, and then believed, how could it have been omitted! Nothing could have been recorded more to the honor of the deceased in respect to their patriotism and courage. This monument is without date, for what reason we are unable to say. But so much is evident, it had not *then* been discovered, that the fire of the British was first returned at Lexington.



In confirmation of our statement and claim, we adduce farther the *Inscription* on the brass cannon given by the *Legislature* to the Artillery company of Concord. "The *Legislature* of *Massachusetts* consecrate the names of *Major John Buttrick* and *Captain Isaac Davis*, whose valor and example excited their fellow-citizens to a successful resistance of a superior number of British troops at Concord Bridge on the 19th of April, 1775, which was the *beginning of a contest* in arms, that ended in American Independence." This inscription, it is believed on good evidence, was written by a distinguished patriot of that period, and approved by the Legislature. Will any one pretend there was a design to misrepresent facts?

The *inscription* on the grave-stone of *Colonel John Buttrick* is also to our purpose. That part of it which was written by the late Governor Sullivan is thus;—"In memory of *Colonel John Buttrick*, who commanded the militia companies who made the *first* attack upon the British troops at *Concord North Bridge*, on the 19th of April, 1775. Having with patriotic firmness shared in the dangers which led to the American Independence, he lived to enjoy the blessings of it, and died May 16th, 1791, aged 60 years." What could have induced Governor Sullivan to propose and prepare such an inscription, if he did not then fully believe that the *first* return of the British fire was at *Concord Bridge*? There appears to have been but one opinion on the subject for almost half a century; except those above recognised, which were chiefly foreign, and for the existence of which we have accounted.

As late as 1818, *Worcester's United States Gazetteer*, under *Concord, Mass.* has these words;—"In this town (Concord) the Provincial Congress met in 1774; and *here* was made the *first resistance* to the British, on the 19th of April, 1775."

Nathan Brooks, Esq. of Concord, affirms, that in years past he has repeatedly heard Colonel William Munroe, of Lexington, relate the transactions of the 19th of April, '75, in that town; and that he never gave him the idea of resistance and firing by the militia. Had the Colonel known at the time that they did return the British fire, how is it possible that it should have gone entirely from his mind for more than forty-eight years, and then come to him clear and plain, that some of the militia did return the fire of the British troops?

The Honorable Samuel Hoar, of Lincoln, who has lived near

Lexington all his days, and was at the fight in Concord, has often said that he never heard of any firing on the British, at Lexington, on the morning of the 19th of April, '75, until within two or three years. How could a man of his opportunities, information, and character have been kept in ignorance so long, had it been a fact that the British fire was returned by the militia of Lexington, as is now pretended!

The present aged clergyman of Concord was, at that time, a member of the University at Cambridge and was at Concord, while the College was there, and has had the charge of that people since November, 1778, and often heard related the interesting events at Concord and Lexington, by persons who were actors and witnesses of them; and he affirms. "that he never heard of the returning of the British fire at Lexington, or the firing of any guns by the militia, when the British troops came up in the morning, until of late; but he always understood that the first return of the British fire was at Concord north bridge." And this is the light in which the late Secretary Bradford views the subject in his History of Massachusetts, who doubtless obtained his information from records and documents in his office.

The affidavits of a number of respectable gentlemen are as follows, viz.

"I, JOHN RICHARDSON, of Newton, in the county of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, of lawful age, do testify and say, that I was at Lexington on the 19th of April, 1775; that no mention was then made, in my hearing, of the Americans having fired upon the British, on the morning of that day, at Lexington;—that I have been personally acquainted with the people of Lexington from that day to the present time;—that the events of the morning of that day at Lexington were the constant topic of conversation for a long time after;—that I frequently heard individuals who were of Captain Parker's company relate the events of that morning, and never heard that Captain Parker's company, or any individual in it, fired upon the British on the morning of that day, until the visit of General Lafayette to this country in 1825, with the exception of one gun, which was said to have been fired by Solomon Brown, while standing in the back kitchen of the tavern, then owned by Buckman, now Merriam, as the British were passing on towards Concord.  
JOHN RICHARDSON."

*Middlesex ss. June 25th, 1827.* Then personally appeared the above named John Richardson and made oath, that the above affidavit by him subscribed is true. Before me, NATHAN BROOKS, *Justice of the Peace.*

"I, SAMUEL HARTWELL, of Lincoln, in the county of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, of lawful age, do testify and say, that I have been acquainted with the inhabitants of Lexington, and particularly with many who were of Captain Parker's company on the 19th of April, 1775, to the present time, and for many years from said time had frequent conversations with people of Lexington concerning the events of the morning of that day at Lexington, and do not recollect that any of the people of Lexington ever stated or pretended, that there was any firing by Captain

Parker's company on the British, on the morning of that day, until within a few years since, except the firing of one gun, after the British had turned and were passing off the common. SAMUEL HARTWELL."

*Middlesex ss. July 19th, 1827.* Then the above named Samuel Hartwell personally appeared and made oath, that the above affidavit by him subscribed is true. Before me, NATHAN BROOKS, *Justice of the Peace.*

"I, ROBERT DOUGLASS, of Portland, in the county of Cumberland in the state of Maine, aged sixty-eight years,—do testify and say, that on the morning of the 19th of April, 1775, I was at my father's house in Woburn, in the county of Middlesex and colony of Massachusetts Bay. On that morning, about one hour before day-break, a man rode up to my father's door, and knocked loudly, and said 'There is an alarm,—the British are coming out; and if there is any soldier in the house, he must turn out and repair to Lexington as soon as possible.' Who that man was, I never knew. I immediately arose, took my gun and equipments, and started for Lexington. In going by Deacon Obediah Kendall's house (about half a mile from my father's) I saw a light, and went into the house; I there found a Mr. Sylvanus Wood nearly ready to go; we then went to Lexington together, where we arrived about half an hour before sun rise; we went into Buckman's tavern and inquired the news about the alarm. Some said the British were coming; others said they were not coming. In about fifteen minutes after we entered the tavern, a person came to the door and said the British were within half a mile. I then heard an officer (who I afterwards learned was Captain Parker) call his drummer and order him to beat to arms. I paraded with the Lexington company between the meeting-house and the tavern, and then marched to the common near the road that leads to Bedford; there we were ordered to load our guns. Some of the company observed, 'There are so few of us, it would be folly to stand here.' Captain Parker replied, 'The first man who offers to run shall be shot down.' The British soon came in sight, with a field officer in front, having his sword drawn;—the British troops then gave three cheers and ran towards us. The Lexington company began to break off on the left wing, and soon all dispersed. I think no American was killed or wounded by the first fire of the British, unless Captain Parker might have been. No one of Captain Parker's company fired on the British, to my knowledge, that morning, and I think I should have known it, had they fired. I knew but two men of the Lexington company, and I never heard any person say that the Americans fired on the British that morning at Lexington.

"After the British marched toward Concord, I saw eight men who had been killed, among whom were Captain Parker\* and a Mr. Porter of Woburn. ROBERT DOUGLASS."

*Cumberland ss. May 3d, 1827.* Then the above named Robert Douglass personally appeared, and subscribed and made oath of the truth of the above written affidavit.

Before me, JOSIAH PIERCE, JR., *Justice of the Peace.*

Mr. Douglass was a major in the regiment to which Woburn belonged in 1791, and is now a respectable and intelligent citizen of Portland.

"I, SYLVANUS WOOD, of Woburn, in the county of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, aged seventy-four years, do testify and say, that on the morning of the 19th of April, 1775, I was an inhabitant of Woburn living with Deacon Obediah Kendall; that about an hour before the break of day on said morning, I heard the Lexington bell ring; and fearing there was difficulty there I immediately arose, took my gun, and with Robert Douglass went in haste to Lexington, which was about three miles distant.

\* It is presumed the witness meant Jonas Parker, as the Captain was not killed.

When I arrived there, I inquired of Captain Parker, the commander of the Lexington company, what was the news. Parker told me he did not know what to believe, for a man had come up about half an hour before, and informed him that the British troops were not on the road. But while we were talking, a messenger came up and told the Captain that the British troops were within half a mile. Parker immediately turned to his drummer, Willam Diman, and ordered him to beat to arms,—which was done. Captain Parker then asked me if I would parade with his company. I told him I would. Parker then asked me if the young man with me would parade. I spoke to Douglass, and he said he would follow the Captain and me. By this time many of the company had gathered around the Captain at the hearing of the drum, where we stood, which was about half way between the meeting-house and Buckman's tavern. Parker says to his men, 'Every man of you, who is equipped, follow me,— and those of you who are not equipped, go into the meeting-house and furnish yourselves from the magazine, and immediately join the company.' Parker led those of us who were equipped to the north end of Lexington Common, near the Bedford road, and formed us in single file. I was stationed about in the centre of the company. While we were standing, I left my place, and went from one end of the company to the other, and counted every man who was paraded, and the whole number was *thirty-eight* and no more.\* Just as I had finished and got back to my place, I perceived the British troops had arrived on the spot, between the meeting-house and Buckman's, near where Captain Parker stood when he first led off his men. The British troops immediately wheeled so as to cut off those, who had gone into the meeting-house. The British troops approached us rapidly in platoons, with a General officer on horse-back at their head. The officer came up to within about two rods of the centre of the company, where I stood. — The first platoon being about three rods distant. They there halted. The officer then swung his sword, and said, 'Lay down your arms, you damn'd rebels, or you are all dead men — fire.' Some guns were fired by the British at us from the first platoon, but no person was killed or hurt, being probably charged only with powder. Just at this time, Captain Parker ordered every man to take care of himself. The company immediately dispersed; and while the company was dispersing and leaping over the wall, the second platoon of the British fired, and killed some of our men. There was not a gun fired by any of Captain Parker's company within my knowledge. I was so situated that I must have known it, had any thing of the kind taken place before a total dispersion of our company. I have been intimately acquainted with the inhabitants of Lexington, and particularly with those of Captain Parker's company, and, with one exception, I have never heard any of them say or pretend that there was any firing at the British from Parker's company, or any individual in it, until within a year or two.— One member of the company told me, many years since, that after Parker's company had dispersed, and he was at some distance, he gave them 'the guts of his gun.'

"After the British had begun their march to Concord, I returned to the common, and found Robert Roe and Jonas Parker lying dead at the north corner of the common, near the Bedford road, and others dead and wounded. I assisted in carrying the dead into the meeting-house. I then proceeded towards Concord with my gun, and when I came near the tavern in Lexington, now kept by Mr. Viles, I saw a British soldier seated on the bank by the road. I went to him with my gun in readiness to fire, if he should offer to resist. I took his gun, cutlass, and equipments from him. I then proceeded with him towards Lexington,— and meeting a Mr. Welch and another person, I delivered the prisoner to them.

"After Welch arrived in Lexington with the prisoner, I understood that another prisoner was taken by Mr. John Flagg, and that they were conducted to Burlington, and put under the care of Captain James Reed. I be-

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\* This does not include those who went into the meeting-house and were "cut off."

lieve that the soldier who surrendered his gun to me was the first prisoner taken by the Americans on that day. SYLVANUS WOOD."

*Middlesex ss. June 17th, 1826.* Then the above named Sylvanus Wood personally appeared, and subscribed and made oath to the foregoing affidavit.

Before me, NATHAN BROOKS, *Justice of the Peace.*

The taking of British prisoners has been mentioned by some as evidence of a battle at Lexington in the morning. We firmly believe that not one was captured, that morning, when fighting or making any resistance. All who were taken at Lexington, in the morning, were willing captives. They designedly separated themselves from their companions, in order to be taken. They preferred this method to desertion, which would be attended with danger. One of the prisoners, who lived and died in Concord, informed one of us, that he got away from the British, that day, in such a manner.

We come now to the *affidavits* and *depositions* of a large number of men before the *Provincial Congress*, then sitting in Watertown, relative to the events and circumstances of the morning of the 19th of April, '75. These depositions were all given under oath.

We first adduce Captain Parker's testimony, the whole of it, which is very concise. Of the other testimonies we shall cite only such parts as affect the question at issue.

"I, JOHN PARKER, of lawful age, and Commander of the Militia in Lexington, do testify and declare, that on the 19th instant, in the Morning, about One of the Clock, being informed that there were a number of Regular Officers riding up and down the Road, stopping and insulting the People as they passed the Road; and also was informed, that a Number of Regular Troops were on their march from Boston, in order to take the Province Stores at Concord; ordered our militia to meet on the Common in said Lexington, to consult what to do, and concluded not to be discovered, nor meddle or make with said Regular Troops (if they should approach) unless they should insult or molest us, and upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our Militia to disperse and not to fire; immediately said troops made their appearance and rushed furiously, fired upon and killed Eight of our party, without receiving any provocation therefor from us."

*Lexington, April 25, 1775.*

ELIJAH SAUNDERSON testifies, "That after orders were given to fire by the British officers, immediately, the Regulars shou'ed aloud, ran and fired on the Lexington company, which did not fire a gun before the Regulars discharged on them. Eight of the Lexington company were killed, while they were dispersing, and at a considerable distance from each other, and many wounded,— and although a Spectator, I narrowly escaped with my life."

*Lexington, April 25, 1775.*

THOMAS PRICE WILLARD testifies, "that the Regulars ran till they came within about eight or nine rods of about an Hundred of the Militia of said Lexington, who were collected on said Common, at which time the Militia of said Lexington dispersed; then the Officers made a Huzza, and the private Soldiers succeeded them: Directly after this an Officer rode before the Regulars to the other Side of the body and hallooed after the Militia of said Lexington, and said, 'Lay down your Arms, damn you, why don't you lay down

your Arms :’ — And that there was not a Gun fired till the Militia of said Lexington were dispersed ; and further saith not.”

*Lexington, April 23, 1775.*

“ We, LEVI MEAD and LEVI HARRINGTON, both of Lexington, in the county of Middlesex, and colony of Massachusetts Bay in New England, and of lawful age, do testify and declare, that on the 19th of April, being on Lexington common as spectators, we saw a large body of regular troops marching up towards the Lexington company ; and some of the regulars on horses, whom we took to be officers, fired a pistol or two on the Lexington company *which were then dispersing*. These were the first guns that were fired and they were immediately followed by several vollies from the regulars, by which eight of our men, belonging to said company, were killed and several wounded.

Sworn to by

{ LEVI MEAD.  
} LEVI HARRINGTON.”

*Lexington, April 23, 1775.*

NATHANIEL MULLIKEN and thirty-three others.—“ We further testify and declare, that about 5 o’clock in the morning, hearing our drum beat, we proceeded towards the Parade, and soon found that a large body of troops were marching towards us, some of our company coming up to the Parade, and others had reached it ; at which time the company began to disperse ; whilst our Backs were turned on the Troops, we were fired on by them, and a number of our Men were instantly killed and wounded — not a Gun was fired by any Person in our company on the Regulars, to our knowledge, before they fired on us, and they continued firing until we had all made our escape.”

*Lexington, April, 1775.*

The next deposition is by fourteen persons, and as follows ; — “ We further testify and say, that about 5 o’clock in the morning we attended the beat of our drum, and were formed on the Parade ; — we were faced towards the regulars, then marching up towards us, and some of our company were coming to the Parade with their backs towards the troops ; and others on the parade began to disperse, when the regulars fired on the company before a gun was fired by any of our company, on them ; they killed eight of our company, and wounded several, and continued their fire until we had all made our escape.”

*Lexington, April 25, 1775.*

TIMOTHY SMITH, at the same date, testifies ; — “ I saw a large body of troops marching up towards the Lexington company then dispersing, and likewise saw the regular troops fire on the Lexington company before the latter fired a gun ; I immediately ran, and a volley was discharged at me, and put me in imminent danger of losing my life. I soon returned to the common, and saw eight of the men, who were killed, and lay bleeding at a considerable distance from each other, and several wounded ; and further saith not.”

The following deposition is from a British soldier, taken like those before mentioned.

“ I, JOHN BATEMAN, belonging to the fifty-second regiment, commanded by Colonel Jones, on Wednesday morning, on the 19th of April, was in the party marching for Concord, being at Lexington, in the county of Middlesex, being nigh the meeting-house in said Lexington, there was a small party of men gathered together in that place, when our said troops marched by ; and I testify and declare, that I heard the word of command given to fire, and some of the said troops did fire, and I saw one of the said party lie dead on the ground nigh the said meeting-house ; and I testify that I never heard any of the inhabitants so much as fire a gun on said troops.

(Signed)

JOHN BATEMAN.”

In reference to this and the preceding witnesses of Lexington, it appears to us very reasonable, to inquire why they did not

“say further,” if truth required or permitted it? Why not say we saw and heard several guns fired on the British *after* they had fired on us? \* If this were then a known fact, we know not how they could, consistently, stop at saying they did not fire on the British *first*. If any other persons, not of the militia company, returned the fire of the British troops, these witnesses, it seems to us, must have known it. There was no danger in testifying that they fired *after* the British had fired upon them, and killed a number. It would have been considered brave and patriotic, and they would have been applauded and honored, though it might have been thought *rash* in so small a company. *Now* the inhabitants of Lexington, and many of the witnesses living, are of this opinion, and appear to think highly of returning the fire of the British troops, on the morning of the 19th of April, '75; and they have endeavoured to represent this to the world as a fact. We have a right to presume that the witnesses could not in truth swear to it at that time. How they have acquired additional evidence, in a long course of years, is not for us to say.

We shall close our evidence in support of our claim by an extract from the address of the *Provincial Congress* to the inhabitants of Great Britain, grounded on the above testimonies.

“*Watertown, April 26, 1775.* By the clearest Depositions relative to this Transaction it will appear, that on the Night preceding the 19th of April instant, a Body of the King’s Troops, under command of Colonel Smith, were secretly landed at Cambridge, with an apparent Design to take or destroy the Military and other Stores provided for the Defence of the Colony, and deposited at Concord — that some Inhabitants of the Colony, on the Night aforesaid, whilst travelling peaceably on the Road between Boston and Concord, were seized and greatly abused by armed Men, who appeared to be Officers of General Gage’s Army — that the town of Lexington by these means was alarmed and a company of the Inhabitants mustered on the Occasion — that the regular Troops on their way to Concord marched into said Town of Lexington, and the said Company, on their approach, began to disperse — that notwithstanding this the Regulars rushed on with great Violence, and first began Hostilities by firing on said Lexington company, whereby they killed Eight and wounded several others — that the Regulars continued their fire until those of said company, who were neither killed nor wounded, had made their escape — that Colonel Smith with the detachment then marched to Concord, where a number of Provincials were again fired on by the Troops, two of them killed and several wounded, before the Provincials fired on them — and that these hostile measures of the Troops produced an Engagement that lasted through the Day; — in which many of the Provincials and more of the regular Troops were killed and wounded.”

It is evident from this address, that the Provincial Congress did not consider the war commenced, or that any battle or engagement had taken place, until the fire of the British troops

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\* See Colonel Barrett’s deposition, before referred to, for a different manner of testifying.

was returned at Concord. And from all the testimony it seems certain, that if there was a *battle* at Lexington on the 19th of April, 1775, Colonel Munroe, the only surviving officer of the company engaged in it, Reverend Joseph Estabrook, Major Robert Douglass, Mr. Sylvanus Wood, and others of the company, were wholly ignorant of it, until, more than forty years afterwards, they were informed of it by others.

From the preceding extract, depositions, and testimonies, we are convinced that Captain Parker ordered his company to disperse, on the near approach of the British troops, that they might not be in a situation exposed and provoking to the British;—that though they did not obey promptly and expeditiously, as was their duty, they *were actually dispersing*, when the British troops first fired upon them;—and that *then* those who were able made their escape as quickly as possible. It appears to us highly probable, that, had the order of Captain Parker been instantly obeyed, there would have been no blood shed at that time and place.

We leave it to the public to trace and mark the discrepancies in the testimonies given in 1775, and those given in 1824 and 1825. We will retain a charitable opinion of the integrity of witnesses at both periods. But we are full in the opinion that there is error somewhere. There are inconsistencies, if not contradictions, which we cannot reconcile. We still firmly believe, as the conclusion from the whole, and what seems to us too plain to be seriously denied, that in truth and all propriety of language, the militia company of Lexington *did not return the fire* of the British troops, on the morning of the 19th of April, 1775, and that the military companies at Concord, commanded by Colonel James Barrett, and led on by Major John Buttrick, *did immediately return* the fire of the British troops, that day at the North Bridge.\* This conclusion appears to us just and fair; and this is the result at which we have aimed. It will not be henceforth denied, we trust, that at that time and place the *first* British blood was shed at the commencement of the American Revolution.

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\* Some years after the 19th of April, '75, the North Bridge was moved lower down the river, and the road discontinued. There is now no open road to the spot where the fight commenced.













George Bancroft

